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Planning News #1

Niagara Falls National Heritage Area

February 2011

Planning for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Begins!

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission recently held its inaugural meeting. Appointed by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar late last year, this group of 21 community leaders (17 commissioners and four alternates) are now hard at work with the National Park Service to make our National Heritage Area become a reality. Congress authorized the establishment of the Commission as the heritage area's "local coordinating entity" to lead the early planning and lasting coordination that a heritage area requires.

The heritage area was recognized by Congress in 2008 for its nationally significant natural phenomenon of Niagara Falls and the Niagara River Gorge, its tourism and recreation, and its culturally significant stories of power, industrial development, and borderland history. It provides a mechanism for organizations, governments, and residents of Niagara Falls, Lewiston, Youngstown, and surrounding communities to come together to conserve, enhance, and interpret the region's natural, scenic, cultural, historic, and recreational resources.

The Commission has started to explore the many opportunities a federal heritage area designation can bring to the Niagara region. Federal funding to support this work is currently limited to planning purposes until a management plan is completed to provide guidance for future initiatives.

Not only the plan, but the planning process itself is important, needing the involvement of everyone working to make the heritage area a success. The next opportunity to participate in an information meeting with the members of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission and the consulting team will be at the end of March. Watch for further details in area news outlets, or email mary.hashemi@johnmilnerassociates.com to receive notices via email. We hope to see you there!

Schedule for Preparing the Management Plan

Dec 2009 – Feb 2011:	Project initiation; development of goals and objectives; introductory public workshop
Dec 2009 – July 2011:	Assessing and reporting on existing conditions and resources; National Environmental Policy Act requirements
Jan 2011 – Mar 2011:	Development of strategies; second public workshop, issues and opportunities
Apr 2011 – July 2011:	Development of alternatives; third public workshop and comment on "alternatives"
July 2011 – Jan 2012:	Management plan development
Jan 2012:	Fourth public workshop and comment on draft management plan
Jan 2012 – Mar 2012:	Final actions



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The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.



City of Niagara Falls, Falls Street circa 1908

What Is a Management Plan?

A management plan lays the groundwork for future initiatives to be led by the Commission and heritage-area partners. It sets priorities and identifies resources and policies needed for the heritage area to develop successfully. Creating the plan provides the opportunity to explore a range of perspectives, ultimately to shape communities and the visitor experience around the asset-based heritage development that lies at the heart of the heritage area concept.

How can the many constituents of the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area collaborate to build their programs and tell more stories of the evolution of the area's landscape and history? How do we extend these opportunities to the largest audience possible? How do we use cultural heritage tourism to help revitalize and preserve our communities through development of our many unique assets? How does the Commission as an organization support such efforts?

To answer such questions, the heritage area concept calls for collaboration among local and state governments, interpretive and recreational attractions, nonprofit and private sector interests, and the region's residents. The heritage area focuses on the entire American side of the Niagara Gorge, the City of Niagara Falls and the two villages of Lewiston and Youngstown, and portions of the towns of Lewiston and Porter. It's a complicated area – the Commission needs your input and ideas!

What Is a National Heritage Area?

The 49 National Heritage Areas located in 28 states are places that tell rich and distinctly American stories. Usually managed by a partnership of organizations and local governments with a single coordinating body, they pool resources (cultural, natural, organizational, and financial) to promote, enhance and conserve the region for the benefit of present and future residents and visitors.

“National Heritage Area” is a designation for nationally distinguished, lived-in landscapes. Recognition signifies a region's importance to American history and culture and supports interpretation to show how a region's geography, people, and ways of life have shaped both the immediate vicinity and the nation. The heritage area concept offers a collaborative approach to conservation that does not compromise traditional local use of the landscape and local control.

Although there are many kinds of regional planning efforts across the country, only heritage areas seek to engage residents, governments, and organizations in telling their stories and working in partnership to protect special resources and reach out to the American public. They are grounded in a region's pride in its history and traditions, and in residents' involvement in retaining and interpreting the landscape for all. They advance economic development through an appreciation that a region's unique assets are fundamental to success – asset-based “heritage development” – and by fostering cultural heritage tourism as one aspect of a region's economy.

Designation comes with limited financial and technical assistance from the National Park Service. As of March 2009, Congress has designated 49 heritage areas, each governed by separate authorizing legislation unique to its resources and desired goals.

As National Heritage Areas mature – the first was designated in 1981 – residents and visitors alike are increasingly enthusiastic in discovering the high quality of the experiences they offer.

They appeal to all ages and interests. Some have opportunities for walking, hiking, biking, and paddling. Some have festivals to attend and museums to visit. Many provide volunteer opportunities, group tours, and multiple-day excursions and can also be visited in combination with more than 80 units of the National Park Service.

The collaboration a heritage area inspires can strengthen communities in many ways. And in a world where American democracy is held up as an example for so many, heritage areas connect us to our roots, our stories, and our places – the wellsprings that made us the strong country we have become today. For more information, see www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FAQ/.



What Will Result from the Management Plan?

The plan will include a broad vision for what it will be like to live in and visit the heritage area after ten years of working on the plan's goals and recommendations. To shape the plan, the Commission and partners identify goals and strategies that focus on the distinct qualities and nationally significant stories that make the region and communities special.

The plan will address requirements in the 2008 legislation establishing the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area (Public Law 110-229):

- To develop comprehensive strategies for engaging, coordinated interpretive presentations and programs that tell the story of the area's heritage; and for encouraging "long-term resource protection, enhancement, interpretation, funding, management, and development of the National Heritage Area."
- To produce inventories of "natural, historical, cultural, educational, scenic, and recreational resources" relating to the interpretive themes identified in the 2005 feasibility study for National Heritage Area recognition:
 - ◆ The Niagara Falls and Gorge as Natural Phenomenon;
 - ◆ Regional Tourism and Recreation;
 - ◆ Power and Industry; and
 - ◆ Borderlands/Border Crossing.

The inventories will help set priorities for stewardship and enhancement of special resources.

- To identify actions that partnering organizations, communities, governmental agencies and individuals can take in collaborating to protect and enhance heritage area's resources.
- To provide step-by-step guidance to implement the plan, including identification of roles and responsibilities of heritage area partners along with existing and potential sources of funding.
- To document commitments for implementation by individual organizations and agencies, plus "adequate assurances that the local coordinating entity has the partnerships and financial and other resources necessary to implement the management plan."

Looking ahead, the heritage area's resources (grant funds, staff, partnerships, etc.) are likely to be deployed in three areas: technical assistance and training; networking and information-sharing; and marketing and promotion. The heritage area can be expected to focus on supporting a tailored combination of high-priority initiatives in interpretation (story-telling), conservation and historic preservation, community revitalization, recreation, community culture (including the arts), and education.

For more information, see www.nps.gov/history/heritageareas/FAQ/.

What Is the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area?

When Congress designated the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area in May 2008, the region's impacts on the natural and cultural development of the United States were recognized at a whole new level. Through the heritage area, public and private partners can join hands to foster tourism, education, and programming initiatives that highlight important events and sites related to American history and culture and the role of hydroelectric power in developing the American economy.

More than six million people visit the Falls each year. The heritage area can help to enhance each visitor's experience in ways that will support revitalization programs in the City of Niagara Falls and strengthen businesses in the river communities to the north. In reaching out to potential partners, the Commission will also connect with related historic sites throughout Niagara and Erie Counties and collaborate with organizations and sites in Canada. The state-designated heritage area for the city, the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Area, is a key partner, as is the Niagara River Greenway.

The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area's management plan will address compatible economic development, conservation of important resources, increased appreciation among residents and visitors of the region's history and contributions in a national context, and greater use of the region's resources for education, vacation experiences, and recreation.

For more information, see www.nps.gov/nifa.

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The Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission

Fifteen of the 17 commission seats established in the 2008 legislation that created the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area (Public Law 110-229) have been filled to date through appointments by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. They are:

- ◆ Dr. Thomas A. Chambers, Niagara University (Commission Chair), nominated by U.S. Congresswoman Louise Slaughter
- ◆ Jeffrey D. Williams, Lewiston Management Group and Niagara Falls Properties (Vice-Chair), nominated by the Mayor of Lewiston
- ◆ Margaret-Ann Hanson, former Village of Youngstown Trustee (Executive Committee), nominated by the Mayor of Youngstown
- ◆ Willie Dunn, Niagara Falls Housing Authority (Executive Committee), nominated by U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
- ◆ Robert H. Borgatti, Niagara County Community College, nominated by U.S. Senator Charles Schumer
- ◆ Bill Bradberry, former City of Niagara Falls Administrator, nominated by U.S. Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (also Chairman of Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Area Commission)
- ◆ Deborah L. Conway, National Park Service, nominated by the Director of the National Park Service
- ◆ Paul A. Dyster, Niagara River Greenway Commission, nominated by the Governor of New York
- ◆ Christopher M. Glynn, Maid of the Mist Corporation, nominated by U.S. Senator Charles Schumer
- ◆ John H. Percy, Jr., Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation, nominated by the Governor of New York
- ◆ Christopher J. Schoepflin, USA Niagara Development Corporation, nominated by the Governor of New York
- ◆ Mark W. Thomas, New York Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, nominated by the Governor of New York
- ◆ Dr. Jan H. van Harssel, Niagara University, nominated by U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
- ◆ Barry White, nominated by the Seneca Nation of Indians
- ◆ Dr. Lillian S. Williams, University of Buffalo, nominated by the Mayor of Niagara Falls

Nominees awaiting appointment are Neil Patterson, Tuscarora Nation, and a representative from the New York Power Authority to be named.

Alternates serving on the Commission are Timothy S. Adamson, Village of Youngstown; Robert A. Gallucci, Village of Youngstown; Marjorie E. Gillies, Niagara Falls Beautification Commission; and Michael J. Marra, Village of Lewiston.